
The Effect of Pair Work on a Word building Task and on a Grammar Exercise

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THE EFFECT OF PAIR WORK ON A WORD-BUILDING TASK AND ON A GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Abstract

This paper reports on a study that was carried out to investigate the effect of pair work on a word-building task and on a grammar exercise in four EFL classes (two groups of 1st of Bachillerato/11th grade and two others of 3rd of ESO/9th grade). Sixty-nine Spanish students took part in this classroom based study. All the participants completed -individually and in pairs- two isomorphic versions of two types of task: a word-building task and a grammar activity. Results of the data analysis showed that the participants did not achieve significantly higher scores on the given tasks working in pairs than individually. This indicates that collaborative work does not always imply an improvement neither in grammatical accuracy nor in morphological knowledge.

Key words: pair work, collaborative learning, individual work, Interaction Hypothesis, input, negative feedback, output, Sociocultural Theory of Mind.

1. Introduction

‘The use of group and pair work is a common teaching strategy which is widespread in education and it has been promoted in both first (L1) and second (L2) language classrooms’ (Storch, 1999: 363).

This use of group work in education, and in particular co-operative group work, is supported by a substantial body of research (Johnson & Johnson, 1990), which has shown that co-operative learning produces both social and cognitive gains.

According to Storch (1999: 363), ‘research findings in both first (L1) and second (L2) language learning have long been supportive of the use of small groups and pair work in the language classroom’.

Studies in L1 pedagogy have shown that learners working in groups are exposed to a variety of viewpoints, co-construct new ways of understanding and develop critical thinking skills (Adams & Hamm, 1996; Barnes & Todd, 1977; Slavin, 1991).

In the field of L2 pedagogy, research findings on group work also support such classroom organization over teacher-fronted classes. For example, Long and Porter (1985), who conducted a review of L2 literature on group work, showed that group work provides L2 learners with more opportunities to use the target language and for a greater range of functions (see also Ohta, 1995) in low-anxiety contexts.

Furthermore, studies by a number of researchers –e. g. Pica & Doughty, 1985; Varonis & Gass, 1985- have shown that compared to teacher-fronted classes or NS (native speaker) –NNS (non-native speaker) pairs, learners in groups or in NNS–NNS pairs engage in more modified interactions,

also called ‘negotiations of meaning’ (Long, 1983). These negotiation moves -e.g. clarification requests, confirmation checks, repairs- are said to make input more comprehensible and in turn facilitate second language acquisition. However, a number of researchers in both L1 (Mercer, 1995; Wegerif & Mercer, 1997; Cohen, 1994) and L2 (Donato, 1989; 1994; Brooks & Donato, 1994)-called for further investigation into the nature of interactions in group and pair work. That is why we set out to explore whether this was the case in a school setting. This way, our study investigates how pair work influences students’ final outcomes over individual results when doing the same tasks.

2. Theoretical background

2. 1. Language learning theories

As Storch (2007: 143) summarizes, from a theoretical perspective, the use of small group and pair work is supported by the Interaction Hypothesis, based largely on the work of Long (1983, 1996), and the Sociocultural Theory of Mind, which builds on the work of Vygotsky (1978). Both linguistic approaches emphasize the importance of interaction for learning. However, whereas the Interaction Hypothesis focuses on interaction, the Sociocultural Theory emphasizes the importance of a particular kind of interaction, that of collaboration (Donato, 2004).

- Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1983; 1985; 1996).

As Baleghizadeh (2010b: 721) reviews, ‘according to SLA researchers, negotiated interaction is the driving force for language learning in that it provides learners with (a) comprehensible input (Pica, Young & Dunphy, 1987), (b) negative feedback (Gass, 1997; Swain, 1995), and (c) an opportunity to modify their output’ (Muranoi, 2007; Shelhadeh, 2002; Swain, 1995, 2005).

Long’s Interaction Hypothesis is built on the importance of comprehensible input for L2 learning (Krashen: 1981). Input refers to language that becomes available to the learner through both listening and reading (Gass & Mackey, 2006). In all approaches to SLA, input is an essential component in the acquisition process in that it provides learners with the crucial evidence from which they can formulate linguistic hypotheses (Gass & Mackey, 2007). This suggests that the input available to learners should be comprehensible (Krashen, 1982). It is argued that negotiated interaction, especially one in which learners have an opportunity to interact with a more competent interlocutor, say a native speaker, provides them with ample comprehensible input (Pica, 1994, 1996). ‘As they negotiate, they work linguistically to achieve the needed comprehensibility, whether repeating a message verbatim, adjusting its syntax, changing its words, or modifying its form and meaning in a host of other ways’ (Pica, 1994: 494).

Thus, as indicated by Gass and Mackey (2007: 181-182), interaction between learners, in the form of negotiation moves categorized as confirmation checks –expressions that are designed to

elicit confirmation that an utterance has been correctly heard or understood, (e.g. *Is this what you mean?*)- , clarification requests- expressions designed to elicit clarification of the interlocutor's preceding utterances (e. g. *What did you say?*) and comprehension checks –expressions that are used to verify that an interlocutor has understood (e. g. *Did you understand?*)- can facilitate second language learning by providing learners with the aforementioned comprehensible input. In his revised Interaction Hypothesis, Long (1996) emphasizes the importance of negative feedback and modified output for second language learning.

According to this scholar, 'negative feedback –which occurs as a reaction to a linguistic problem- can come from numerous sources such as teachers, other learners or even native speakers' (Balenghizadeh, 2010b: 721).

Negative feedback can be explicit (e. g. explicit correction) or implicit (e. g. clarification requests, recasts) and its role is to raise learners' awareness to problematic aspects of their utterances. It is suggested that the feedback learners receive during the process of negotiated interaction pushes them to modify their output (McDonough, 2005; Muranoi, 2007; Shehadeh, 2002; Swain, 1995, 2005). Researches have argued in favor of positive developmental effects when learners modify their output (Gass, 1997; Swain, 1995, 2005). For instance, Swain claimed that learners needed to be 'pushed' to produce more accurate, appropriate and comprehensible forms after receiving feedback from an interlocutor (Swain, 1995, 2005). Therefore, when interlocutors signal lack of comprehension, learners may reflect upon their language and modify the linguistic and pragmatic features of their output (Balenghizadeh, 2010b: 722).

Research guided by this interactional perspective (e. g. Pica, 1991; Pica *et al.*, 1987) has shown that, provided careful attention is paid to the tasks used and the strategic grouping of students in terms of gender, familiarity and L2 proficiency, small group work provides learners with opportunities to give and receive feedback. Thus, from this theoretical perspective, it is interactions between learners –or learners and native speaker interlocutors- that drive second language learning. (Storch, 2007: 144). In Balenghizadeh's words (2010b: 723), 'pair work activities create fertile farmland in which the seeds of *negative feedback* and *modified output* (both significant features of negotiated interaction) easily grow'.

- Sociocultural Theory of Mind (Vygotsky, 1978)

From this perspective, human cognitive development –including language learning- occurs in social interaction between individuals in society. In its original conception, it was proposed that interaction was between an expert –e. g. parent, teacher- and a novice (child), with the expert carefully attuning the assistance provided to suit the novice's needs. This carefully attuned assistance has been referred to in the literature as 'scaffolding' (Wood *et al.*: 1976).

Vygotsky's most widely known concept, the Zone of Proximal Development, is defined as 'the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult supervision, or in collaboration with more capable peers' (Vygotsky, 1978: 85). Vygotsky believed that assistance and cooperation had a big impact on the cognitive development of individuals (Balenghizadeh & Rahimi, 2012: 22).

In the field of second language research, studies have shown that such scaffolding can occur not only in teacher-learner interaction (e. g. Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994) but also in peer interaction, when learners work in small groups or pairs. Studies by Donato (1988, 1994) and Storch (2002, 2005) have shown evidence of 'collective scaffolding', a process whereby learners pool their linguistic resources in order to reach resolutions to the language related problems they encounter. Through this type of dialogic interaction, called 'collaborative dialogue' (Swain, 1997), 'learners work together to solve linguistic problems and/or co-construct language or knowledge about language. Language mediates this process as both a cognitive tool to process and manage meaning making and as a social tool to communicate with others' (Swain, Brooks & Tocalli-Beller, 2002: 172).

However, these researchers have also shown that group work does not necessarily mean collaboration, and that it is only when learners work collaboratively that they create opportunities for language learning. Swain (2000: 102) defines collaborative dialogue as 'dialogue in which speakers are engaged in problem solving and knowledge building'. In other words, collaborative dialogue involves learners in co-constructing new knowledge of and about language and it also provides students with opportunities to consolidate existing knowledge (Swain & Lapkin, 1998).

Last but not least, in order to have a more complete theoretical frame, Swain's Output Hypothesis (1985, 1998) should not be ignored.

According to this hypothesis, output may influence noticing and promote L2 acquisition. This way, Swain attributes an important role to collaborative dialogue, which takes place during peer work.

Through collaborative dialogue learners engage in co-constructing their second language and in building knowledge about it. Collaborative language production tasks may therefore prompt learners to deepen their awareness of linguistic rules. This may trigger cognitive processes that may both generate new linguistic knowledge and consolidate existing knowledge (Swain & Lapkin, 2000; 2001).

Related to the Output Hypothesis and the role attributed to interaction is the assumption that metacognition may have a facilitative effect on L2 acquisition. As argued by Ellis (2000), there are

properties in a task that will predispose or induce learners to engage in certain types of language use and mental processing that are beneficial for acquisition. Particular language production tasks, such as problem-solving activities, may encourage learners to talk about the linguistic problems they encounter.

Verbalization of problems in contexts in which learners are engaged in meaningful interaction may help them to understand the relation between meaning, form and function, since these kinds of activities may lead to a greater metacognitive awareness.

Nonetheless, the hypothesized beneficial effect of metacognition, as triggered by collaborative dialogue, seems to be indirect and language independent, in so far that the increased awareness of linguistic rules and formal and functional relationships promotes L2 acquisition in general, but does not necessarily lead to better conversational skills (Kuiken & Vedder, 2002:344). It is therefore irrelevant whether the interaction between the L2 learners takes place in L2 or in L1). Metatalk about language may therefore help learners to understand the relation between meaning, form and function (Long & Robinson, 1998).

As a consequence, noticing and interaction are important conditions for second language learning. It is hypothesized that while learners interact with each other, their language ability improves, as far as their morpho-syntactic, lexical and pragma-rhetorical skills are concerned. (García Mayo, 2001a; 2001b; 2002).

2. 2.Collaborative learning

Cooperative learning is defined as ‘group learning activity organized so that learning is dependent on the socially-structured exchange of information between learners in groups, and in which each learner is held accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of others’ (Olsen & Kagan, 1992: 8). It is considered to be an effective teaching method in ESL/EFL settings by many scholars (Brown, 2001; Chien, 2004; Holguin, 1997; Kagan, 1995; Liao, 2003).

According to Johnson and Johnson (1991), collaborative learning has four defining characteristics:

1. Positive interdependence. All group members participate to achieve a group goal.
2. Individual accountability. Each member of each group is held responsible for his or her own learning, which naturally contributes to group learning.
3. Cooperation. Students are expected to discuss, solve problems and collaborate together.
4. Evaluation. Members of the group review, evaluate and reflect upon their work together to make the necessary changes.

Kagan and McGroarty (1993) have mentioned that cooperative learning offers students more opportunities to discuss, share and communicate with their peers and teachers using the target language. This is why Jacobs and Hall (1994) have pointed out that cooperative learning principles and techniques are tools which teachers use to encourage mutual active participation among all members of a group as it enables more varied discussion, a more relaxed atmosphere among students, greater motivation, more negotiation of meaning and an increased amount of comprehensible input.

Consequently, 'second and foreign language learners can benefit from classes taught through cooperative learning methods. They have the opportunity to naturally practice the second or foreign language and improve their language skills, social skills and communicative ability. Cooperative learning creates a less threatening and more comfortable environment for students to speak' (Balenghizadeh & Rahimi, 2012: 22).

2.3. Pair work and individual work on different task types

As Baleghizadeh (2010a) points out, 'the impact of pair work on various types of form-focused tasks has been the subject of a number of intriguing studies in recent years' (405).

Goss, Ying-Hua and Lantolf (1994), who compared grammatical tasks completed individually and in pairs by learners of Spanish, found modest differences in favor of pairs but only on some grammatical features.

Foster and Skehan (1999) investigated the effects of different pre-task planning conditions – teacher-led, solitary and group-based- on learners' language in a decision-making task. Of interest is the finding that the group planning condition did not confer advantages for the learners in terms of the fluency, accuracy and complexity of the language produced. Solitary planners produced language that was more complex and more fluent. Nevertheless, studies comparing individual and pair work on writing and grammar-focused tasks showed some advantage for pair work.

In an early study, Storch (1999) compared ESL students' individual and pair performance on several grammar-focused activities (a cloze exercise, a text reconstruction and a short composition). The study showed that there were mixed effects on grammatical accuracy.

On the one hand, there was a positive effect on the overall grammatical accuracy, but on the other, there was a varying effect on certain grammatical items. Thus, Storch concluded that not all grammatical items did benefit from the same kind of treatment. Moreover, she admitted that the improved accuracy might have been the result of the longer time students spent on doing the activities when they worked in pairs.

In a subsequent study, Storch (2007) investigated the merits of pair work on a text-editing task in an EFL setting. Surprisingly enough, this study found only a modest difference in the mean

accuracy score of texts edited by pairs compared to those edited by individual students. In spite of the insignificant statistical difference between the mean score of the two groups, Storch concluded that pair work was beneficial for most students in that it provided them with opportunities to engage in a number of interactional moves such as seeking and receiving confirmation or giving each other explicit and implicit negative feedback.

In a similar study, Kuiken and Vedder (2002) compared the performance of two groups of Dutch high school students, working in pairs and working individually, on a dictogloss. Quantitative analysis of the data showed no significant difference between the performances of the two groups. The qualitative analysis, however, indicated that pair work had resulted in more noticing of the target structure of the study, i.e. the passive (Baleghizadeh, 2010a: 407-408).

Despite these studies, there is still a lack of research on students' pair work distribution. Taylor and Wigglesworth (2009: 327) raised a number of questions which still remain to be answered: Is there any evidence that working with a more proficient learner helps a less proficient learner? Can this be detrimental for the most proficient learner or does being in the role of 'knower' or 'expert' actually enhance their own language performance? Nevertheless, in their study, Kuiken and Vedder (2002: 354) concluded that 'for less proficient learners, the information gap in interactions is certainly an advantage: they are able to profit from the correct solutions proposed by more advanced learners. The opposite may not always be the case: an incorrect structure proposed by a less proficient learner may be accepted by other learners simply because he or she has a more extrovert personality and more social prestige'.

3. The study

3.1. Statement of topic area and general issues

The aim of this research is to study the effect of pair work on a word building task and on a fill in the gaps grammar exercise which tested students' knowledge of the first and second conditionals.

Based on a previous study carried out by Baleghizadeh (2010a), this report is a partial replication which extends the scope of that work adding an additional type of task, a grammar exercise in order to test and contrast pair work and individual work in two different linguistic areas: morphology – tested by the word formation exercise- and grammar.

In addition, the sex variable will be studied in the activities done individually in order to see whether this factor exercises any influence in language learning.

Finally, the current study has also a higher number of subjects, analyzing students in two different levels: 3rd of ESO (9th grade) and 1st of Bachillerato (11th grade).

3.2. Significance of the current study

Due to the **popularity** of pair and group work in both L1 and L2 classrooms the current study can be instructive not only for researchers but also for practitioners and even for learners, making them more aware of the L2 learning process, its possibilities and advantages.

According to Storch (2007), ‘despite the strong pedagogical and theoretical arguments for the use of small group and pair work, there has been relatively little empirical research comparing small group and individual work’. Given this small body of existing research there is clearly a need for further research on the efficacy of small group and pair work on language tasks. Moreover, most studies have focused on negotiation on lexical items and larger syntactic units, but not on grammar or morphology.

Such research is also needed because not all language learners –nor teachers (see McDonough, 2004) - seem convinced of the merits of small group and pair work.

In a study of ESL high school students’ preferences conducted in Australia, Mishra and Oliver (1998) found that although 70% of the students had positive attitudes towards group and pair work, very few of the learners, especially from South-East Asia, liked group and pair work when carrying out grammar-focused tasks. The students preferred to work individually on such tasks because they felt that this could provide them with more opportunities to practice their grammar. Some researchers (Kinsella, 1996; McDonough, 2004) reported on ESL students’ concerns about learning the ‘wrong’ grammar from their peers when working in small groups on grammar-focused tasks.

4. Research questions

Given the small body of research on the impact of peer interaction –especially on the grammatical accuracy of learners-, there is clearly a need for further research in this area. Given that previous studies have been carried out in ESL contexts, this study, which has been done in an EFL context –as Balenghizadeh’s (2010a, 2010b)-, seeks to fill this void in the literature by investigating the benefits of pair work on a word formation task and on a grammar activity. Thus, the research questions that guided this study were as follows:

- 1) Do learners increase their accuracy in a word formation exercise and a grammar activity working in pairs or individually?
- 2) Does proficiency level affect performance individually and in pairs?
- 3) Does the kind of task affect performance individually and in pairs?
- 4) Does sex affect performance?

5. Method

5. 1. Participants

This study tested four clusters of high school adolescent students: two groups – A and B- of 1st of Bachillerato (Junior High School) and two other groups –A and B again- of 3rd of ESO (Freshman High school). The division of each school year in two different assemblages – A and B- in the English subject is made at random in order to have fewer students in each class and to favor their learning of English.

The participants were 69 (26 male and 43 female) ninth and eleventh grade –aged 14 and 16-, EFL student at Santa Teresa de Jesús School in Pamplona who volunteered to take part in this study. Their level of English proficiency was pre-intermediate and intermediate respectively.

The participants first completed both tasks –word formation and the conditionals grammar exercise- individually and then they completed isomorphic exercises in pairs. The pairing was done by their teacher and the researcher.

5.2. Material

The materials used in this study were four exercises: two word formation tasks and two grammar activities. Each pair were isomorphic versions of the same task: both featured the same genre, they were the same length and had approximately the same number of similar grammatical points to attend to (see Appendixes).

The word formation exercises were taken from the Cambridge *First Certificate English 6 with answers* (2005). The texts employed were 141 and 155 words long respectively and each one contained 10 gaps.

The grammar activities were taken from Oxford *Kickstart Student's Book* (2005) and from a webpage (www.es.tiching.com). The activity from the webpage was amended by the researcher in order to make it more similar to the exercise taken from the book. Participants of the present study had some prior knowledge of the two targeted grammatical structures: first and second conditional clauses.

5. 3.Procedure

The participants completed the given activities under two conditions: individually and collaboratively (i. e. in pairs). In the collaborative condition, students worked in pairs selected by both their English teacher and the researcher according to their English level (High-High, High-Intermediate, High-Low, Intermediate-Intermediate, Low-Low). Following Storch (1999), each pair was given only one copy of the activity in order to encourage joint production.

The average time spent on carrying out the tasks both individually and in pairs was 5 minutes because the researcher thought this time limit was enough to complete the tasks. The exercises were

done at the end of the class, after the practitioner had taught his lesson. This is a novelty compared to similar studies in which the amount of time doubled when students worked in pairs (Storch, 1999, 2005, 2007; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2007) or others where pairs spent more time performing the task (Balenghizadeh, 2010b).

The participants working in pairs were encouraged to cooperate with each other while doing the activity and the researcher monitored them to make sure that they would speak in English. No attempt was made to audiotape students' pair talk; nonetheless, the researcher took sporadic notes as she listened to some of the pairs.

The study involved four groups and the treatment period lasted four sessions for each cluster. The first two days were devoted to carrying out the exercises individually -the grammar task in the first session and the word formation activity in the second one- and the next two sessions to pair work. During the grammar classes, students were provided with 12 sentences containing some hypothetical situations and were asked to complete the missing parts –individually and in pairs- using either the first or the second conditional.

No help from the teacher or researcher was provided.

Table 1. Tasks carried out in each session

Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4
Conditional exercise (Individually)	Word formation exercise (Individually)	Conditional exercise (In pairs)	Word formation exercise (In pairs)

5.4. Data collection

For the purposes of this paper, the main and unique source of data were the completed language exercises. Exercises 1 and 3 –conditional activities- were worth a total of 12 points each while exercises 2 and 4 –word formation- were worth 10 points each.

Once the exercises were corrected by the researcher, the data were classified into different tables, first in a Word document and later on an Excel spreadsheet. The different data were organized according to class year, group and sex variables.

While correcting the activities, the researcher took note of the most frequent mistakes among students.

5. 5. Data analysis

Descriptive statistics were obtained for all groups and exercises. A t-test for dependant samples was carried out for the statistical analysis using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)

computer program with alpha set at .05. in order to determine, if there was a statistically significant difference between the mean score of the exercises done in pairs and those carried out individually. Different classes results and boys' and girls' results were also compared to answer questions 3 and 4.

ANOVA analysis were carried out to analyze the factor of sex and the differences depending on proficiency levels, that is comparing 1st of Bachillerato and 3rd of ESO subjects.

6. Results and discussion

The following section shows the descriptive statistics (mean score and standard deviation) in all the four exercises (tables 2-4) whereas tables 5 to 9 represent the results organized according to the variable of sex.

Table 2.Descriptive statistics for individual and pair work.

Class	Data	CCEx.1 Ind	CC Ex.3 P	CW Ex.2 Ind	CW Ex.4 P
3 rd A+ B	Mean	7,39	6,06	3,06	2,76
	Deviation	2,95	3,75	2,25	2,02
1 st A+ B	Mean	8.09	8,73	5,9	7,67
	Deviation	2,58	2,31	2,48	2,72
Total	Mean	7,73	7,31	4,37	5,06
	Deviation	2,78	3,39	2,74	3,41

As can be seen in Table 2, pair work seems to benefit high level students but not lower level students. Bachiller students performed better in pairs than individually in both tasks, while 3rd of ESO students performed worse in pairs than individually in both tasks.

Proficiency level affected not only the scores of the exercises done in pairs but the results in general. As should be expected, learners with a higher English proficiency level –those in 1st of Bachiller- had higher scores than lower level students -those in 3rd of ESO- both when working individually and in pairs (8,09 and 5,9 for 1st of Bachiller 7,39 and 3,06 in 3rd of ESO in the individual tasks, and 8,73 and 7,67 for 1st of Bachiller and 6,06 and 2,76 for 3rd of ESO respectively in the pair work exercises). 1st of Bachillerato students outperformed those in 3rd of ESO in all the exercises, and the difference was statistically significant in exercises 2 ($F(1,65)= 22,994$, $p=,000$), 3 ($F(1,30) = 5,703$, $p=,023$) and 4 ($F(1,30)= 34,114$, $p=,000$). Even though proficiency level affected the performance of both groups in all the exercises, the difference was strikingly big (4,91 points) in exercise 4, the word formation task in pairs, which apparently was much more difficult for students in 3rd of ESO. Similarly, it is also worth pointing out the high standard deviation (3,75) of 3rd of ESO when carrying out the conditional exercise in pairs.

As for the effect of task type, pupils in 3rd of ESO had higher scores in the conditionals exercises (7,39 and 6,06 individually and in pairs, respectively), than in the word formation tasks, where results were quite lower (3,06 and 2,76). Moreover, students' scores while working in pairs (6,06 for the conditional exercise and 2,76 for the word formation task) were even worse than when working individually (7,39 for exercise 1 and 3,06 for exercise 3).

1st of Bachillerato scores were more homogenous (8,09 in exercise 1; 8,73 in exercise 2; 7,67 in exercise 4). Nevertheless, the mean score decreased in activity number 2, the word formation task individually (5,9). However, as has already been mentioned, 1st of Bachillerato students improved their results when working in pairs in both kind of tasks.

The results of *t*-tests indicated that the only case when there was almost a significant difference between individual and pair work was in the group of 1st of Bachillerato when carrying out the word formation task ($t=2,015$, $P=.064$). This would indicate that students produced almost significantly more accurate answers when they completed the task collaboratively than when they worked individually.

Regarding individual and pair work depending on level and group, as can be seen in tables 3 and 4 when 3rd of ESO students worked in pairs students' scores decreased. Students performed better individually in both types of exercises, except in group A, where students scored slightly higher when working in pairs in the word formation exercise. (2,00 and 2,13 individually and in pairs). However, the results of the *t*-test indicated that the differences were not statistically significant either in the grammar exercise or in the word formation activities when done individually or collaboratively. That is, the pair condition did not improve students' performance neither on the grammar nor on the morphology task.

Table 3.Descriptive statistics for individual and pair work, 3rd of ESO

Class	Data	CCEx.1 Ind	CC Ex.3 P	CW Ex.2 Ind	CW Ex.4 P
3rd A	Mean	7,39	4,88	2,00	2,13
	Deviation	2,97	4,16	1,7	1,64
3rd B	Mean	7,39	7,11	4,06	3,33
	Deviation	3,01	3,22	2,29	2,24
Total	Mean	7,39	6,06	3,06	2,76
	Deviation	3,01	3,22	2,29	2,24

Another striking result was that the mean accuracy score for students while working individually was quite high in the grammar exercise -7,39 in both groups- whereas the score in the word formation was much lower (2,00 and 4,06 for 3rd of ESO A and B respectively).

On the other hand, we must highlight once more the quite high standard deviation (4,16) in 3rd of ESO A in the conditional exercise carried out in pairs.

Table 4.Descriptive statistics for individual and pair work, 1st of Bachiller

Class	Data	CCEx.1 Ind	CC Ex.3 P	CW Ex.2 Ind	CW Ex.4 P
1 st A	Mean	8,33	8,75	6,07	6,75
	Deviation	2,74	1,91	2,71	2,38
1 st B	Mean	7,89	8,71	5,73	8,71
	Deviation	2,49	2,87	2,31	2,87
Total	Mean	8,09	8,73	5,9	7,67
	Deviation	2,57	2,31	2,48	2,72

As represented in Table 4, students' scores were fairly high in the conditionals exercises both individually and in pairs (8,33 in exercise 1 and 8,75 in exercise 3 in 1st A and 7,89 and 8,71, respectively in 1st B). However, these results were quite lower when carrying out the word formation exercises (6,07 in 2 and 6,75 in 4 in 1st A and 5,73 in 2 in 1st B) except for task 4 in 1st B (8,71).

Contrary to the findings in 3rd of ESO, students with a higher proficiency level performed better when working in pairs than when working individually in the second type of exercises. However, the differences in mean accuracy scores between individual and pair work (8,33, individually and 8,75, in pairs in the conditional exercise whereas in the word formation task the scores were 6,07 ,and 6,75, individually and in pairs, respectively) were again not statistically significant in 1st A.

It is interesting to note that in the class of 1st of Bachillerato B, the difference between the scores was slightly larger when carrying out the word formation task: 5,73 for individuals and 8,71 for pairs. This would be the only case when working in pairs would imply a more notable improvement in the results. This difference could be explained due to the fact that this group had more students with a lower English level compared to the other three classes where most pupils' English proficiency was either advanced or intermediate. Consequently, it seems that, as more proficient learners worked with less advanced students collaboratively, the former may have helped the latter while carrying out this activity, which is supposed to be more difficult than the conditional exercise. This means that low level students improved their work while working with more proficient classmates.

The following extract is an example of an interaction between a low level student (student A) and a high level one (student B). While carrying out the exercises collaboratively, low level students completely agreed with what their higher level mates thought most of the times, as they were aware that their mates' English knowledge was broader and thus, they thought their partners would be right for sure.

A :-(...) Did you say *poisonous*?

B: - Yes.

A: - *Poisonous*. And the next one, *freezer*?

B: -*Freezer*? No, *freezing*. Are you *freezing*?

A: - You are right, it's *freezing*.

The excerpt shows very clearly that the deliberations and decisions were made by the proficient student B with little consultation with A, who simply wrote down what B dictated. As Storch (2007: 154) indicated in a similar case, 'A's contribution to the decision-making process was often limited to expressing a general agreement (line 5) or repeating the final phrase or word uttered by B at the end of his speech (line 3). The relationship this pair exhibits is clearly dominant/passive: where one participant simply appropriates the task and makes all the decisions, while the other participant's involvement in the interaction is minimal'. This is, pair work does not always mean collaboration.

Therefore, according to the analyzed data, and contrary to this study's expectations, there is not any significant difference between students performing the tasks individually and in pairs; this is, pair work does not necessarily improve students' results

On the other hand, in terms of sex distribution, tables 5 to 11 summarize the findings about the nature of the grammar and the word formation tasks when done individually.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for individual work according to sex in both 3rd of ESO and 1st of Bachiller.

Class	Sex	Data	CC Ex. 1 Ind	CW Ex. 2 Ind
3 rd ESO A + B 1 st Bach A + B	Boys	Mean	6,85	3,73
		Deviation	2,49	2,97
	Girls	Mean	8,26	4,8
		Deviation	2,84	2,53

As shown in Table 5, considering the variable of sex, girls outperformed boys both in the grammar exercise and in the word formation task (8,26 vs 6,85, and 4,8 vs 3,73 respectively). However, only the difference in the conditionals exercise's score was statistically significant ($F(1,63) = 4,585$, $p = ,036$).

Table 6.Descriptive statistics for individual work according to sex in both 3rd of ESO A and B.

Class	Sex	Data	CC Ex. 1 Ind	CW Ex. 2 Ind
3rd ESO A + B	Boys	Mean	6,6	2,53
		Deviation	2,35	2,36
	Girls	Mean	7,95	3,45
		Deviation	3,25	2,14

Regarding the factor of sex and level, in 3rd of ESO (see Table 6) girls also had higher results than boys, although this difference is not significant either in the grammar exercise or in the word formation task.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics for individual work according to sex by level and group

Class	Sex	Data	CCEX.1 Ind	CW Ex.2 Ind
3rd ESO A	Boys	Mean	7,13	1,63
		Deviation	2,03	1,2
	Girls	Mean	7,6	2,33
		Deviation	3,66	1,41
3rd ESO B	Boys	Mean	6,00	3,57
		Deviation	2,71	2,44
	Girls	Mean	8,27	4,36
		Deviation	2,97	2,25

Table 7 shows that girls also had higher scores in both groups (A and B) of 3rd of ESO, although the differences were again not statistically significant. A more a notable difference of can be observed between the performance of girls and boys in 3rd ESO B (8,27 vs 6,00) in the grammar exercise. This is probably due to the fact that the most skilled students in the whole 3rd of ESO were three girls in this class.

Table 8. Descriptive statistics for individual work according to sex by level

Class	Sex	Data	CC Ex. 1 Ind	CW Ex. 2 Ind
1st Bach A + B	Boys	Mean	7,18	5,36
		Deviation	2,75	3,04
	Girls	Mean	8,55	6,21
		Deviation	2,42	2,12

Analyzing the factor of sex in both classes of 1st of Bachillerato (Table 8), we can perceive that girls results were once more higher than boys, both in the conditionals (8,55 vs 7,18) and word formation tasks (6,21 vs 5,36) and both in 1st of Bachillerato A (8,82 vs 7,00 in the conditionals exercise, and 6,55 vs 4,75 in the word formation) and in 1st of Bachillerato B (8,27 vs 7,29 in the conditionals exercise and 5,75 vs 5,71 in the word formation). None of these differences were statistically significant though.

Table 9. Descriptive statistics for individual work according to sex by level and group

Class	Sex	Data	CCEx.1 Ind	CW Ex.2 Ind
1st Bach A	Boys	Mean	7,00	4,75
		Deviation	2,94	3,4
	Girls	Mean	8,82	6,55
		Deviation	2,64	2,42
1st Bach B	Boys	Mean	7,29	5,71
		Deviation	2,87	3,04
	Girls	Mean	8,27	5,75
		Deviation	2,28	1,67

Therefore, as far as the sex factor is concerned, in all four groups girls achieved higher scores than boys. Nonetheless, as seen above, this disparity was statistically significant ($F(1,63) = 4,585$, $p = ,036$) only in the conditional exercise when considering both groups (3rd of ESO and 1st of Bachiller) together.

The most interesting finding of this study is that, contrary to our expectations, there was not any significant difference between students' results when working collaboratively and individually. That is, even though students' scores were higher when working in pairs when their proficiency level was higher and performed worse in pairs when their proficiency was lower, the results were not statistically significant.

Nevertheless, it should be highlighted that, as the tables show, students were much more successful when doing the conditional exercises than when carrying out the word formation tasks, regardless of the students' English level. Even though not statistically significant, this difference was quite noticeable above all in both groups of 3rd of ESO, where the scores of this exercise were particularly low (2 and 2,13 in 3rd A and 4,06 and 3.33 in 3rd B).

Nonetheless, it should be pointed out that 3rd A's low results could be due to the fact that they had to complete both exercise 2 -conditionals in pairs- and 4 -word formation in pairs- the same day

since there were no more classes left to carry out the research. This was a disadvantage because students had to be given 10 minutes to do both exercises at the end of the same session. They spent too long doing the first and they did not have 5 minutes to do the second and, consequently, the scores were lower than expected. In fact, most of the scores in this last exercise were 0, which can explain the low figures.

Moreover, this large difference in the scores between the grammar exercise and the word formation task could be due to the difficulty of the word formation task itself. Students found this exercise much tougher than the conditionals activity, even though they were used to doing this activity in class.

This way, the most common mistakes in this morphological task were spelling mistakes in words like *appearance*, *loneliness* or *equipment* (they wrote (**equipement*)). They also had problems with prefixes (*extra-ordinary*)

In addition, students sometimes got confused with abstract nouns -they wrote **hotness* instead of *heat* or they used the concrete form, i. e. *friends* for *friendships*- and quite a vast amount of students did not understand the procedure as many of them did not read the instructions. This way, some thought they had to put the words in the correct order while others did not realize they had to change the form of the given word and create a new one. This last case happened several times to 1st of Bachiller students due to lack of attention.

Nevertheless, in contrast to what the researcher expected, even though students in 3rd of ESO had barely learnt the conditionals (zero, first and second) during the course of this research, their results were not much lower than those in 1st of Bachiller. The difference was of scarcely one point (7,39 and 7,11 in both 3rd A and B versus 8,33 and 8,75 in 1st A and 7,89 and 8,71 in 1st B).

It was a foregone conclusion that students in 1st of Bachiller would not have any doubts with these constructions as they were supposed to have already acquired and internalized them as they had been studying them at school since 2nd of ESO -3 years before- while those students in 3rd ESO had not assimilated the conditional patterns yet.

However, in most of the cases students in 1st of Bachillerato failed to succeed in this task not because they did not know the grammatical theory –although they sometimes mixed up both the first, second and even the third conditional structures as they were studying the latter at that moment- but because they claimed they did not see the difference in meaning between the first and the second conditional even in Spanish.

For this reason, some of the sentences were ambiguous for them and they sometimes used the first conditional where the second was needed and vice versa. Besides, many errors can again be

explained because a lot of students did not read the exercise instructions carefully and they therefore did not know which conditionals they had to use.

Similarly, 3rd of ESO students were also confused about when each conditional type had to be used in their native language. This confusion could be due to the fact that these students live in a part of Spain where there is a tendency to use the *apodosis* (second clause) as the *protasis* (first clause). This produces sentences like: *If I *would win the lottery, I would go to the Caribbean* (*Si *ganaría la lotería, me iría al Caribe*), which are considered correct. Despite knowing the grammatical theory, students mixed both parts of the conditionals because of meaning-related conceptual problems and very likely because of transfer from their mother tongue.

As far as grammatical errors are concerned, most of the mistakes in the conditional exercises were related to the omission of the -s in the third person singular (there were a lot of occurrences in 3rd of ESO but not so many in 1st of Bachillerato).

Furthermore, students in 3rd of ESO had a lot of problems with the verb to be since they mixed up its past –*was/were*– very easily and were confounded with its negative form.

On the other hand, some aspects regarding pair and individual work that the researcher could observe during this study were that, firstly, students do not like working individually. As they had to do the exercise by themselves, with their books closed and without talking to their mates, students felt like in an exam situation –even though both the researcher and the English teacher made it clear from the very beginning that the exercise was not an exam and thus, it would not be graded for their English subject. However, most of the students felt quite nervous (above all, the youngest students, those in 3rd of ESO). These pupils' nerves could explain why some of them tried to cheat although both the English teacher and the researcher were present during the task execution.

Consequently, students were much more enthusiastic while working in pairs as they felt that the task was not an exam. They even sometimes tried to work in groups with other pairs. In addition, students were more relaxed, as already stated by previous research in the field (Jacobs & Hall, 1994; Balenghizadeh & Rahimi, 2012) although pairs formed by low-low students –above all in 1st of Bachillerato– did not like doing these exercises, either individually or in pairs.

Finally, although they were encouraged to speak in English while solving the exercises interactively, the vast majority of the students spoke in Spanish if they saw the researcher was far from their desks.

7. Conclusion

This research was an attempt to answer the previously stated questions:

- 1) Do learners increase their accuracy in a word formation exercise and a grammar activity working in pairs or individually?
- 2) Does proficiency level affect performance individually and in pairs?
- 3) Does the kind of task affect performance individually and in pairs?
- 4) Does sex affect performance?

No statistically significant differences were found in the results by pairs compared to those of students working individually; overall, when students completed tasks in pairs they were not more successful than when doing them individually. These results are surprising in contrast to previous studies and, especially, to the original research this study is based on (Balenghizadeh, 2010a). The stated hypothesis was that interaction would lead to higher scores. Nonetheless, the results of this research seem to support the study by Storch (2007), which found no significant difference between the two modes of performance (collaborative versus individual).

These outcomes may be due to the small number of items included in the tasks themselves or because the same time -5 minutes- was given to both pairs and individuals to complete each exercise. Had pairs been given more time, they might have performed better. The time factor should be considered in further studies. However, according to Storch (2007, 145) we can conclude that ‘such findings, based purely on a quantitative comparison of scores would suggest that there are no advantages for students to work in pairs on grammar-focused tasks’.

Nevertheless, in terms of the second research question, it seems that proficiency level has an influence in the fulfillment of the task. As it is expected, those students with a higher English level - 1st of Bachillerato students-perform significantly better than more novice students (3rd of ESO pupils). Additionally, although results were not statistically significant, higher proficiency level students did benefit from pair work. This might be due to the fact that these students are more mature and they know how to share their knowledge and reach agreements.

It seems that the type of task affects performance individually and in pairs. The word formation task is the activity which profits best from collaborative work, as it could be seen with 1st of Bachillerato exercise 4. One possible explanation for these findings is that less complex grammatical items, such as the conditional structures, where decisions can be based on clear rules, may favor students when working individually while more complicated tasks such as the word formation

exercise might work against weak students since they only have their own linguistic knowledge to draw on (Storch, 1999: 371).

However, even though interaction among students has not led to significantly different scores, learners working in pairs used both their receptive and their productive language skills and they engaged in more negotiations of meaning in order to obtain the correct answers. Moreover, these negotiations and verbalization of problems provided students with comprehensible input (Pica, Young & Dunphy, 1987), their peers' negative feedback (Gass, 1997; Swain, 1995) and also opportunities to modify their output (Muranoi, 2007; Shelhadeh, 2002; Swain, 1995, 2005), as previous research has illustrated. This way, we can conclude that the importance of interaction is vital for language learning as it enhances collective scaffolding while learners pool their linguistic resources to reach resolutions to the language related problems they encounter. The slightly greater grammatical accuracy in some of the exercises may also have been due to what Stratman and Hamp-Lyons (1994) as well as Russo et al. (1989) refer to as the 'acoustic' or 'auditory feedback' when available during verbalization. In this study, pair work provided opportunities for two types of feedback: individual acoustic feedback as learners verbalized their own decisions, as well as for peer feedback.

Furthermore, it has been noticed that students progressed in a more relaxed atmosphere and felt less anxious and more motivated while working in pairs. They also improved their social skills and their communicative ability, issues all to be investigated further.

Finally, it seems that, although slightly, the sex factor does influence the performance in exercises. Females outperform males in all the tests of the study.

Two limitations of this study have to be stated. First, the number of participants involved in the study was relatively small and we had to deal with differences between groups as some students were missing in some of the classes. Secondly, we have to consider the duration of the treatment -the two conditional exercises and the two word formation tasks-, which was about 20 minutes in total (5 minutes for each exercise).

More studies should be carried out in order to shed light on the effects of pair and individual work as well as on the distribution of the pairs. Although one of the original objectives of this research was to investigate whether pair distribution has an impact on the fulfillment of a grammar and a word formation exercise, this has not finally been possible due to time restrictions.

Given the small-scale nature of this study, these conclusions are tentative and further studies are needed which examine the interaction of task type and grammatical structures. Given the widespread use of pair work in language classrooms, and the interest in developing language exercises and tasks to improve L2 learners' grammatical accuracy, such research seems to be

pertinent. Based on Balenghizadeh, (2010a), three things need to be further investigated: the first is related to which task types are more likely to be affected by pair work, as it is not yet clear whether all task types would equally benefit from this type of treatment. The second thing to be explored is the long-term effect of pair work and collaborative learning on the morphological and grammatical competence of students. This will shed light on whether students, in the long run, can work autonomously, without peer assistance, or not. In future research, how pairs should be organized by the level and a more detailed analysis of the nature of the interaction taking place during the conditional and word formation tasks should also be investigated.

As far as this study is concerned, we will also add that, in case of being replicated, it would be helpful to test the same type of exercise several times in order to eliminate the possible bias of the unfamiliarity with the activity. This way, the possibility of the exercises not being comparable will also be eliminated.

We may conclude that, although the quantitative analysis did not show significant gains when learners are given the opportunity to interact, students working in pairs used both their receptive and their productive language skills and they engaged in more negotiations of meaning in order to obtain the correct answers, enhancing their language learning process in a non-anxiety context.

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10. Appendixes

1. First or second conditional? (Individually).

Put the verbs in brackets into the first or second conditional.

- 1 A I want Laura to come to Jason's party on Friday.
B Me too. Do you think _____ (come) if Jason _____ her? (call)
- 2 A Sarah has always wanted to stay in an expensive hotel, but she can't afford it.
B Yes, if Sarah _____ (be) rich, she _____ in an expensive hotel. (stay)
- 3 A I can't believe it! The TV is broken again and tonight is our favourite programme on TV!
B Don't you worry, if dad _____ (fix) the TV set, we _____ (be able) to watch our favourite programme tonight.
- 4 A Zack has failed his driving test twice!
B That test is quite difficult, but if Zack _____ (try) harder, he _____ (pass) his driving test.
- 5 A Laura is very pretty but she is sometimes very rude.
B If she _____ (not be) so impolite, I _____ (enjoy) her company much more.
- 6 A That's a very nice picture of Tom!
B Yes, Tom _____ (be) amazed if you _____ (show) him the picture you drew.

2. Read the following text and use the words given in the box to form one word that fits in the same numbered gap in the text. There is an example at the beginning (0). (Individually).

The London underground map

The London underground map is (0) extremely well designed. Simple, easy to understand and (1) _____, it performs its primary task of guiding both inhabitants and (2) _____ round the underground system in London very well. The man behind this great (3) _____ was called Henry Beck, an (4) _____ of the London Underground Drawing Office, who designed the map in 1931. The design of the map showed great (5) _____ because it represented a complex network of (6) _____ clearly. This design was later used by most of the world's underground systems.

The map used before 1931 was messy and (7) _____. So Beck decided to sketch out a better one using a diagram rather than a (8) _____ map. This new map was an enormous (9) _____ with the public when, in 1933, it made its first (10) _____ on underground platforms and at station entrances.

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|-----------------|
| (0) EXTREME |
| (1) ATTRACT |
| (2) TOUR |
| (3) ACHIEVE |
| (4) EMPLOY |
| (5) ORIGINAL |
| (6) COMMUNICATE |
| (7) CLEAR |
| (8) TRADITION |
| (9) SUCCEED |
| (10) APPEAR |

3. First or second conditional? (In pairs).

Put the verbs in brackets into the first or second conditional.

- 1 A We're not late, are we?
B No. We _____ (be) fine if we _____ (leave) in the next ten minutes.
- 2 A Come on, can't you and Anne be friends?
B No, I _____ (speak) to her again unless she _____ (say) sorry for what she's done.
- 3 A So you think it's my fault that I feel so tired?
B Yes, you _____ (feel) much better if you _____ (go) to bed at a reasonable time.
- 4 A What's your idea of the most perfect place for a holiday?
B I think I _____ (go) to the Seychelles if I _____ (have) the money.
- 5 A Do you and your brother get together very often?
B No, we _____ (see) each other more if we _____ (live) closer, but he lives in Scotland.
- 6 A Is it going to be a big party?
B Yes, if most people _____ (come), there _____ (be) about 100 of us.

4. Read the following text and use the words given in the box to form one word that fits in the same numbered gap in the text. There is an example at the beginning (0). (In pairs).

Running round the world

John Shaw will (0) *shortly* be setting off on a 50,000 km run, which will make him the first person to perform the (1) _____ act of running all the way round the world if he succeeds.

His timetable includes the (2) _____ Russian winter and the burning African summer. And he has no back-up team for (3) _____. He will be running alone, carrying all his (4) _____ on his back.

'My biggest fear is not the physical challenge, but (5) _____', Mr Shaw said. 'I'm as sociable as anyone and I'm very (6) _____ that I will form many (7) _____ on the way'.

On a trial 2,000 km run under the blazing (8) _____ of the African sun, he came across wild baboons and (9) _____ snakes, but he proved that a target of 60 kilometres a day was (10) _____. 'I have made up my mind to do it and I will. Running is my life,' he said.

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|--------------|
| (0) SHORT |
| (1) ORDINARY |
| (2) FREEZE |
| (3) ASSIST |
| (4) EQUIP |
| (5) LONELY |
| (6) HOPE |
| (7) FRIEND |
| (8) HOT |
| (9) POISON |
| (10) REASON |